

Good Afternoon:

My name is Susan Gellinas. I have traveled down the road of mental illness probably most of my life. I have been a victim of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. As a 14-year-old teenager, I was sent to a catholic school by the juvenile court because I wouldn't attend high school because of the problems at home and the way my peers made fun of me. I was drinking to block out the pain and to fill this void in my life. The 18 months I spent there perhaps were the most stable part of my life. I knew stability and what I was expected to do.

I got married and had 3 children and was divorce after ten years. These were my dark years because I didn't know what to do in my abusive situation because back in those years abuse was never talked about openly. I did leave several or more times but somehow I was convinced to work it out. How I was deceived. I finally did it after five years. I took the children and ran for the car while my husband was chasing me. I locked the doors so he can't get in and I drove away to never look back. I was stalked for almost five years from him until he meant someone new. He threatened to kill me and I knew he could do it because he has attempted several times while living with him. This is the tip of the iceberg of the many abuses I encountered throughout my life.

It was hard to raise children while being single. At 30, I have my first hospitalization for severe depression and anxiety. I was in the hospital a whole year hiding what had happen to me because of guilt and shame. Finally after hiding my past I told a therapist after two years about the abuses bestowed upon me. I just knew I can trust her and in telling her some of my stress uplifted. When I was released, I than

attended outpatient groups five days a week. I did this for over five years and benefited from it. I learned about my illness and the proper ways to handle it. I am thankful for Waterbury Hospital for all that they done for me because at that point of my life I wanted to take mine. Later I joined the Independence Center; this is a non-profit for the mentally ill. I had found purpose and a new meaning of life that people do actually care. I now work a part-time job with the center and the reward is giving back to those in need, as I was.

My testimony is about how non-profits are cost effective than a state run services. Our clubhouse besides other non-profits has a high staff turnover because there is no COLA for this year and a small one in previous years. These turnovers affect members or clients of non-profits because trusting someone can be very hard and when you do that person will leave. We must accept change but how much change is unacceptable when it can be prevented. I do understand why people move on for better paying jobs. I wish this legislation would hold a forum with us that do have mental illness and heard about the struggles we go through besides living with this illness. I am not ashamed of who I am now or am I ashamed that I have this illness.

Also, if co pays are put medications it would put people with this illness to choose between shelter and food or medications. Shelter and food will win out because it is essential. Without medications will hospitalization be next in the long run, costing more money?

In conclusion I would like to thank you for what I do have in benefits and services besides your ear on these issues.